

# In The Net

## A Play In One Act

### By Percival Wilde

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#### CHARACTERS:

Milligan  
Noyes  
Wilks  
Murdoch

SCENE—A large, extremely simple room. A large safe, obviously new, occupies the position of honor near the centre of the stage.

As the curtain rises Noyes, an old watchman, enters the room on his regular round through the building. Milligan, a policeman in full uniform, starts up from

his chair where he has been dozing.

MILLIGAN—Well? NOYES—(starting violently)—How you did frighten me, Mr. Milligan!

MILLIGAN—Been on your rounds?

NOYES—Just finished, sir.

MILLIGAN—Nothing unusual?

NOYES—(earnestly)—You know, sir, I don't like it. It's my place, you see, to look after things: to see that everything's all right. It's as if the firm didn't have enough confidence in me—as if they didn't trust me.

MILLIGAN—(laughing boisterously)—You? What could you do?

NOYES—(drawing himself up)—I? Just wait and see, sir!

MILLIGAN—But you don't like us, eh?

NOYES—No, sir, I don't! I can't turn without running into one of you gentlemen. Upstairs—there's Mr. Reilly, smoking a pipe—a pipe, mind you—with his feet on Mr. Crawford's desk. In the cellar there's Mr. Flynn, with some of his friends playing Canfield.

Outside there's—oh, I don't know all their names, but everywhere I look there's police! police! How many cops—how many of you gentlemen are here?

MILLIGAN—Bout two dozen, I guess.

NOYES—And to catch one man! When I could do it all by myself!

MILLIGAN—Well, you'll have your chance.

NOYES—And I'll use it, sir, I'll use it! Do you think—do you think he's coming?

MILLIGAN—Sure as the Day of Judgment.

NOYES—Twelve o'clock, he said.

MILLIGAN—And he'll be here.

NOYES—That's what he wrote.

MILLIGAN—Do you remember what he said?

NOYES—Every word, sir. "Dear Sirs—The newspapers announce that you have completed an absolutely burglar-proof safe. Gentlemen, there is no such thing. To convince you I shall call at twelve, Tuesday night, and I trust that you will publish an apology for your absurd statement Wednesday morning. Cordially yours, J. Henry Murdoch, P. S.—Kindly have the safe removed to a large and airy room—your storeroom has an offensive odor. J. H. M."

MILLIGAN—(pompously)—Don't you worry.

NOYES—But don't let him touch the safe, will you?

(The door opens, and a middle-aged, commanding, man enters.)

MILLIGAN—(challenging him)—Stop! Who are you?

WILKS—Wilks, United States Secret Service.

NOYES—Good Lord! More of them!

MILLIGAN—(saluting)—Roundsman Milligan, sir, Thirty-third Precinct.

WILKS—(taking command at once)—Who's this man?

NOYES—Why, I'm the watchman, sir, been here thirty years, sir.

WILKS—Get out! How many men in the building?

MILLIGAN—Fourteen, sir.

WILKS—How are they divided?

MILLIGAN—Three each roof and cellar, four upstairs, six on this floor, one here.

WILKS—What orders?

MILLIGAN—Let anybody in—let nobody out. We're to let him open the safe if he comes.

WILKS—Correct.

MILLIGAN—There's a thousand dollars in marked bills inside.

WILKS—I gave the order. Now, how about this room?

MILLIGAN—Been over every inch, sir.

WILKS—Windows?



"Who's this man?"

MILLIGAN—Too high up. Four men below them other side.

WILKS—Walls?

MILLIGAN—Sounded every inch.

WILKS—Floor?

MILLIGAN—No trap doors.

WILKS—So this is the safe?

MILLIGAN—Yes, sir.

WILKS—Burglar-proof?

MILLIGAN—So they say.

WILKS—And Murdoch thinks he's going to get into it!

MILLIGAN—Do you think he's coming?

WILKS—Coming? (nodding grimly) Yes.

MILLIGAN—Er, how does it happen that the Secret Service is after him, too?

WILKS—(wheeling about angrily)—Milligan! How long have you been on the force?

MILLIGAN—Nine years, sir, come December.

WILKS—And you haven't learned to mind your business yet? (Opening the door) Noyes!

NOYES—(appearing at the door)—Yes sir.

WILKS—You will wait out here. Don't move an inch from the door. Understand me?

NOYES—Yes, sir.

WILKS—(closing and locking door)—All right. (Producing wax and thread, and fastening thread across door; See this, Milligan?)

MILLIGAN—Yes, sir.

WILKS—Nobody can open that door without breaking the thread.

MILLIGAN—Yes, sir.

WILKS—Come here. (Milligan crosses over) Put your hand on that knob. Now don't let go till I give you the word.

MILLIGAN—Yes, sir.

WILKS—Now I'll go over the walls.

(Wilks begins to examine the walls minutely. The lights suddenly go out.)

WILKS—(excitedly, in the dark)—Did you turn out the lights?

MILLIGAN—(with equal excitement)—No, sir.

WILKS—Then—(He interrupts himself suddenly) Sah!

(A noise is heard, as of a man tapping the face of the safe with a hammer. Milligan gasps audibly.)

MURDOCH'S VOICE—All right, officer, I know you're there.

(There is a flash of blinding light from the safe. Murdoch is working with an electric arc which illuminates his face perfectly, but shows nothing else.

WILKS—(from somewhere in the background)—How are you getting along Murdoch?

MURDOCH—Pretty well. (A flash) Say!

WILKS—Yes?

MURDOCH—(after a pause)—Haven't I heard your voice before?

WILKS—Guess so.

MURDOCH—(a flash)—You're Wilks, aren't you?

WILKS—Yes.

MURDOCH—Secret Service, by Jove!

WILKS—Yes.

MURDOCH—It's a compliment, Wilks; it's a real compliment!

(A pause; a brilliant flash. He turns to the policeman) And who may you be?

MILLIGAN—Milligan; Thirty-third Precinct.

MURDOCH—(in an aggrieved tone, after a pause)—Expected nothing less than a sergeant; and they only send a cop!

MILLIGAN—Seventeen in the building.

MURDOCH—Ah, that's better. (There is a dazzling flash) So you'll get me?

MILLIGAN—Yes, I'll get you!

MURDOCH—How about it, Wilks?

WILKS—(quietly)—We'll get you.

MURDOCH—(a pause)—Ho! Ho! (The sound of the hammer) How's your wife Wilks?

WILKS—Doing nicely, thanks.

MURDOCH—Don't mention it. (There is a flash) Gee!

MILLIGAN—What is it?

MURDOCH—Getting there.

MILLIGAN—(excitedly)—Now the time, Mr. Wilks?

WILKS—No, you fool!

MURDOCH—(after a pause)—Don't call him nasty names Wilks!

WILKS—Milligan, keep your hand on the door knob.

MILLIGAN—Yes, sir.

MURDOCH—(thoughtfully)—Going to let me open the safe, eh?

WILKS—Yes.

MURDOCH—Let me steal the money inside?

WILKS—Yes.

MURDOCH—That's nice of you; mighty nice. (There is a flash) By the way, who said this safe was burglar-proof?

WILKS—You don't think so?

MURDOCH—(flinging open the door with a clang)—No!

MILLIGAN—Now the time?

WILKS—One minute!

MURDOCH—Then you pinch me, eh?

MILLIGAN—Surest thing you know. You think you're going to get away?

MURDOCH—(with limitless assurance)—I know I'm going to get away. (There is total darkness as the inner door of the safe gives noisily. With only a second's pause) All right! I've got the money. Let 'er go!

(There is a sound of running feet.)

WILKS—Lights! Quick!

MILLIGAN—They don't work!

WILKS—Then your lamp, man!

MILLIGAN—(turning on his pocket flash and crossing hastily to the electric light switch)—The wires have been cut!

(He repairs them quickly. The lights go on. A wire leads from the broken place to a carbon pencil at the safe, which is open and wrecked. Wilks and Milligan are alone in the room.)

WILKS—Where is he?

MILLIGAN—(running about the room)—I saw him plain as day!

WILKS—Yes! So did I! Now where is he?

MILLIGAN—He must be here!

WILKS—(crossing hastily to the door)—The thread is unbroken!

(He tries the door) Looked! (The two men run excitedly about the room, looking for Murdoch in the most preposterous places) He can't have left the room! It's impossible!

MILLIGAN—He's not here, sir.

WILKS—Rubbish! He must be!

(He walks about the room impatiently, glancing at the windows, the walls, the door. He stops suddenly; places at Milligan; then in an altered tone of voice) You are sure he's not here?

MILLIGAN—(stammering)—Yes, sir.

WILKS—Well, where's he gone? He didn't vanish into thin air, did he?

MILLIGAN—(hesitatingly)—Er, no, sir.

WILKS—Did you take your hand off that door knob?

MILLIGAN—Well—

MILLIGAN—Answer me!

MILLIGAN—Only a minute, sir, after he was here.

WILKS—A minute. That was long enough!

MILLIGAN—(eagerly)—But the thread isn't broken!

WILKS—Eh? (With a changed expression, and suddenly visible suspicion) You thought of the thread, did you?

MILLIGAN—What do you mean, sir?

WILKS—(crossing to the door quickly, unlocking it, and throwing it open)—I'll show you what I mean! Noyes!

NOYES—Yes sir.

WILKS—Come in here! (Noyes enters; Wilks locks the door behind him.)

NOYES—Didn't show up, did he, sir?

WILKS—Didn't show up? He's been here and gone! Look!

NOYES—(catching sight of the wrecked safe) Good Lord!

WILKS—Here! I have no time for drive! You stay outside the door!

NOYES—Yes, sir.

WILKS—See anybody go by?

NOYES—Why, no, sir.

WILKS—(savagely)—You lie!

NOYES—What?

WILKS—Don't try any of that on me! The man's been here. He's gone. There's no other way out, is there? Now, why did you let him go? Quick, the truth!

NOYES—I swear to God, sir—

WILKS—The truth I want! The truth!

NOYES—(doggedly)—The man didn't pass that door!

WILKS—(in a towering rage)—He didn't, eh? Well, I'll fix you! Give me your gun! (Noyes does so) Hold out your hands.

(He handcuffs him.)

NOYES—Mr. Inspector, I swear—

WILKS—Shut up! (Indicating a chair) Go over there! Sit down!

Now, Milligan, are you going to tell the truth?

MILLIGAN—(interrupting)—I don't care what he didn't! I want to know what he did! What have you got to say?

MILLIGAN—Nothing, sir.

WILKS—Well, I'll tell you what happened! You're the watchman! You took the thread off the door in the dark. You let him out—yes, the two of you! And you put the thread back in the dark! That's what you did!

MILLIGAN—(desperately)—I didn't.

WILKS—Don't give me any back talk! You're under arrest! Your gun! Your handcuffs! (Handcuffing him with his own handcuffs) Now, I'll fix you! I'll break you for this, by George, I'll break you! Had the man here under your thumb, and let him get away! Let him get away! You call yourself a policeman, you do? Why you're a joke! A joke! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! (He breaks into a prolonged peal of laughter, which, at first simply sarcastic, gradually becomes exulting and boisterous. Milligan and Noyes rise as if hypnotized and watch him) Murdoch? Know who Murdoch is, you fools? Why, I'm Murdoch! (He claps on bushy eyebrows and a mustache, and speaks in Murdoch's voice) How's your wife, Wilks? (And the reply, in Wilks's voice, to the limitless surprise of his prisoners, comes from the other side of the room) Doing nicely, thanks! (He whips off the eyebrows and mustache) Didn't know I was a ventriloquist, did you, Milligan? (He unlocks the door, smiles, is gone, and the door swings shut behind him. MILLIGAN—(after a long pause, breaking an agonized silence)—Now what I'd like to know is who in hell's going to believe us! THE END

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